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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to increase participation of families in home-school literacy activities. The school was located in a suburban village in the northeastern United States. Data indicated that many families of first- and second-grade minority students who were bused to the school for integration purposes were not participating in home-school activities. A target list of families was established and a comprehensive solution strategy to increase family participation was implemented. The solution strategy consisted of: (1) parent workshops to help families understand how they can be involved; (2) staff development to support parent involvement efforts; and (3) individual meetings with families to develop individual plans for family literacy. The program was coordinated by the school psychologist. Positive outcomes included substantial gains in the participation of minority and non-neighborhood families as well as increased family participation in academic activities (e.g. homework completion and projects). Family participation in other activities (e.g., parent workshops and PTA activities) remained low. Positive outcomes are interpreted as being more a result of the dynamic interactions that developed between home and school than in the specific activities. A combination of leadership and personal attention to teachers and families created a momentum for action which led to improved communication and increased family participation. (Contains 37 references. Appendixes present teacher interview questions, a blank individual family plan for literacy, three notices of parent workshops, outlines and objectives of parent workshops, and tips for parents who want to help their children become readers. (RS)

Encouraging the Participation of Families of Elementary-Age Children in Home-School Literacy Activities through Staff Development, Parent Workshops, and Individual Family Plans

by

Natalie Austin Fulwider

Cluster 53

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier:

Anthony J. Napoli

Superintendent of Schools

Port Chester, New York

May 25, 1995

This practicum report was submitted by Natalie Austin Fulwider under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

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Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

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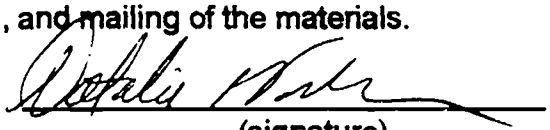
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

Twenty-three thousand people, from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, live in this suburban village located in the northeastern section of the United States. Thirty-three hundred children are enrolled in four elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and a variety of parochial or private schools. These children reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the community. Immigration from Central and South America has resulted in a recent rise in the number of Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students while economic decline has increased the numbers of children from lower income or welfare homes. What was once a fairly stable community of professional and blue-collar factory workers, can now be characterized as a rapidly changing and diverse community that also includes recent immigrants (legal and illegal), public assistance recipients, and unemployed workers.

The school district and community have applied for and received several large grants to develop programs to deal with a relatively high rate of illiteracy in certain segments of the community, including the new immigrant population. Most significant is the securing of an federally sponsored Even Start grant which aims to increase family literacy in poor families with

preschool children. Although administered by the school district, the program involves many community agencies including Head Start, a center for Hispanics, the YMCA, and a community center located in a less affluent section of the village.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is a school psychologist assigned two days per week to one elementary school building serving 290 students in grades K - 4. This school is located in a more affluent area of the community and has historically enrolled Caucasian, middle class youngsters living within the immediate neighborhood. In order to decrease the ethnic segregation that was occurring in other elementary schools in the district, students who live outside the neighborhood began to be bussed to this elementary school three years ago. Most of the children who are bussed to the school are from African-American and Hispanic lower income homes, in contrast to the children from the largely Caucasian and middle income homes near the school. The bussing in of students has primarily affected the younger grade levels with current enrollment figures indicating that the first and second grades are composed of 78 neighborhood children and 44 non-neighborhood children. There are three first grade and three second grade classrooms, each with one teacher. The school also has one full-time reading teacher who conducts Reading Recovery lessons with approximately 10 first graders per year.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

School staff recognize the importance of home involvement in the development of literacy skills and there are many opportunities for parents to become involved (e.g., Parents as Reading Partners (PARP), summer reading, "Book-it"). The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is an active group who hold fund-raising activities, sponsor "fun-days" for the students, and participate in many school-based activities. However, differences have been noted in rates of family participation in home-school activities between families of neighborhood children (largely Caucasian and middle income) and families of non-neighborhood children (largely minority and lower income). Since many of the home-school programs are designed to increase family literacy activities to support reading development in children, children from non-participating families often come to school unprepared and are not able to participate in, or fully benefit from, academic classroom / school activities (e.g., class discussions of books, show and tell). More importantly, most of the children from non-participating families are also the same children who are struggling to acquire beginning reading skills are currently considered "at risk" for academic failure.

Briefly stated then, the problem is that many families of "at-risk" children who live outside the school neighborhood are not participating in home-school activities.

Problem Documentation

Data collected on kindergarten and first graders following the March, 1994 school-wide PARP program indicates that minority children and children bussed to the school from other neighborhoods had much lower participation rates than Caucasian children and children who live within the neighborhood. Whereas 75 out of 89 neighborhood families participated in and completed the PARP activity, only 13 out of 41 families who live outside the neighborhood participated and completed the activity. Participation from minority families was also poor. Only 16 out of 49 minority families (6 out of 25 African-American families and 10 out of 24 Hispanic families) completed the PARP activity in contrast to 71 out of 84 Caucasian families who completed the program.

Observations during the 93-94 school year reveal that non-neighborhood parents and families did not participate in PTA-sponsored activities. Observations revealed that none of the parent volunteers at the annual "Fun Day" event were parents of children who live outside the neighborhood. Observations also revealed that none of the organizing parents and parent volunteers at a PTA-sponsored fund-raising "carnival" activity were parents of non-neighborhood children.

Interviews conducted with kindergarten and first grade teachers in the spring of 1994 indicated that all six teachers felt that home-school communication was less than satisfactory with children from non-neighborhood homes.

An interview with the school's reading teacher confirmed the writer's observation that many of the students whose families did not participate in the 93-94 PARP activity are considered "at-risk" and are currently receiving supplemental reading instruction, special education reading instruction, or are on a waiting list to be seen for supplemental reading instruction.

Causative Analysis

There are several possible reasons why non-neighborhood parents have not been participating in the school's home-school activities. As noted in Chapter I, many of the families who live outside the neighborhood are lower income families. As a consequence, these families do not always have readily available or inexpensive transportation to school, and must take a taxicab across town. Additionally, many of these families are working-poor who work long or evening hours which makes it difficult to attend school activities during the day or to work with their children at night. Some of the parents have poor literacy skills themselves which makes it difficult both to read notices home inviting them to participate, and to read with their children or help with school work. Furthermore, notices sent home have almost always been in English only, making it impossible for Spanish speaking parents to understand.

There is an additional factor that may be at least partly responsible for the poor rates of family participation. Interviews with minority parents whose children are bussed to this school revealed that many of them feel somewhat uncomfortable in this mostly Caucasian, middle class school. One parent noted that she was never "dressed right" for meetings. Other parents of children being bussed to this school indicate that they resent the fact that their children were "capped out" of their neighborhood school and sent across town to this school. This resentment may be a factor in their lack of participation. Unfortunately, these feelings of resentment are also matched by resentment

from some neighborhood parents over the fact that minority and poor children are being sent to this school. A group of neighborhood parents has met with the school principal to voice concerns. It is likely that these parents are reluctant to extend personal and genuine invitations encouraging the new parents to participate in PTA activities.

It is also noted that the teachers in this school have not received training in non-traditional methods of communicating with homes and have relied on the traditional methods (notes and phone calls) which have been successful with neighborhood families. Due to economic conditions, some of the families of bussed children do not have telephones which makes phoning home impossible. As noted above, some of the families speak only Spanish and there are no Spanish-speaking members of the school staff. Teachers often communicate with families only when there has been an emergency or when there is a problem with a child. This may result in parents feeling that the school has only bad things to say about their child, a feeling which probably fosters anger, rather than cooperation.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of recent literature regarding home-school collaboration and family literacy provides (a) support for a positive relationship between parental involvement and educational success, (b) evidence that parent involvement in children's schooling is often inadequate, and (c) possible causes of the lack of parent involvement.

There is uniform support in the literature for the notion that family involvement and "endorsement" of school increases the educational success of children (American Psychological Association (APA), 1993; Carlson, 1993; Christenson, 1992; Greenberg, 1989; Henderson, 1988). Christenson notes that when parents are involved with their children's schooling, "students show

improvement in grades, test scores, attitudes, and behavior; complete more school work; are more engaged in classroom learning activities; and have higher attendance rates and a reduction in suspension rates" regardless of student grade level, family income level, or type of educational program (1992, p. 15). Henderson (1988) refers to 53 studies on parent involvement programs collected by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) and notes that the research overwhelmingly demonstrates that school programs which include a parent involvement component produce students who perform better academically than do identical school programs which do not include parent involvement. Parent involvement is seen as so important in children's education that the American Psychological Association's Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education recently identified "parent and community involvement" as one of the 12 principles of "learner-centered education" (APA, 1993).

Despite this general agreement that parent involvement in schools is important, especially regarding the development of early literacy skills, a 1987 Gallup Poll reported that 41% of public school parents say they are "not well informed" about their child's schooling (Gallup & Clark, 1987). A review of articles concerning home-school relationships finds many possible causes for the frequent lack of strong parent involvement in children's education.

As society and family life in the United States evolved during the movement from agriculture to industry and from small communities to large cities and sprawling suburbs, the "context" of schools changed (Comer, 1986). Schools that were once a part of a community where everyone knew everyone, became more distant and isolated from families. Many educators note that historically, parents and the community were involved in all aspects of public education, including the establishment of schools and the

development of curricula. As teaching became more "professionalized," parents moved away from decision-making and the "experts" took over, creating a business-like atmosphere and bureaucracy that served to further distance parents (Carlson, 1993; Christenson, 1992; Greenberg, 1989; Lindle, 1989; Mavrogenes, 1990; Seeley, 1989). Gradually Americans began to believe that the "professional" educators knew best and, by mutual agreement, the professionals were left totally responsible for children's schooling and education. This development has been seen as a major obstacle to parent participation (Comer, 1986) and unfortunately, it continues to prevail today in all too many schools, despite clear evidence that parent involvement improves student performance (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Some school personnel continue to believe that parents are a meddling intrusion and do not welcome them as participants.

There is interesting evidence to suggest that even when schools say they want parent involvement, they may define involvement rather narrowly. In a survey conducted at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Chavkin and Williams (1987) found that principals' and teachers' definition of parent involvement was parents attending school plays or fund-raising for the school. Parents on the other hand, defined parent involvement much more broadly. They indicated that involvement meant tutoring their child, helping in the classroom, sitting on school committees, and sharing the decision-making role. This suggests that even when school personnel say they support parent involvement, they may not mean the kind of involvement that parents want. As Comer observes, "some schools pay lip service to the importance of parent participation but don't give parents the opportunity to play a meaningful role in the life of the school" (1986, p. 444).

Educators repeatedly state that most parents, regardless of culture, race, or socioeconomic level, want to be involved in their children's schooling. Some suggest that parents may be unsure how to become involved (Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Mavrogenes, 1990; Spiegel, Fitzgerald, & Cunningham, 1993). Leitch and Tangri (1988) interviewed teachers and parents at two inner-city junior high schools. More than one-third of the parents reported that they had never been asked by the school to do anything. Those that were asked reported being asked only to attend meetings or to work with a parent-teacher association. Mavrogenes (1990) suggests that some parents are afraid they will be seen as interfering if they volunteer and the above discussion suggests that this may be a realistic perception. Parents want the school to tell them how to become involved. Leitch and Tangri's findings suggest that often schools do not invite parents to become participants and do not give parents the support they need to become involved.

When parents are wiling to be involved and are encouraged by the school, there still may be barriers to participation. Finders and Lewis (1994) asked non-participating parents why they did not come to school. The parent's comments clearly articulated some very real issues on the part of families. One such issue is the economic and time constraints of many families. Tough financial conditions prohibit some parents from taking time off from work and coming to the school during regular school hours (Christenson, 1992; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Greenberg, 1989; Mavrogenes, 1990; Moles, 1987; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). Leitch and Tangri (1988) report that both parents and teachers find that the rise in the numbers of women who work outside the home has altered home-school ties. One woman interviewed by Finders and Lewis reported that the school is always asking for money for supplies or trips; money she does not have. She feels

angry at the school and is upset that she cannot give her child what the other children have. Such feelings promote home-school conflict, not home-school cooperation.

Cultural and/or language differences between school and families can also reduce communication opportunities and effectiveness (Greenberg, 1989; Hiltonsmith, 1993; Spiegel, et al., 1993; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992). Families whose home language is other than English do not understand notes home, cannot speak on the telephone to school personnel, cannot write notes back to the school, and have difficulty helping children with English literacy skills.

When families are from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds than the school staff, special barriers to positive parental involvement have been noted by educators. Class bias and "institutional racism" (Greenberg, 1989) may result in feelings of alienation and hostility that interfere with the establishment of good relationships. Comer (1986) suggests that the struggle for civil rights has added to the distrust between minority, low income families and white, middle income school personnel. In addition, parents from different backgrounds may feel uncomfortable and unsure of themselves in the school culture and thus are reluctant to participate. Finders and Lewis state, "Because the experiences of these families vary greatly from our own, we [schools] operate on assumptions that interfere with our best intentions" (1994, p. 52).

Some parents come to school with negative feelings due to their own school experiences as students (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Mavrogenes, 1990). Perhaps they had a difficult time academically or behaviorally when they were in school. For these parents, visits to the school may be seen as unpleasant reminders of their past difficulties. Whenever a teacher calls the home, it may be immediately viewed as negative. Parents who were unsuccessful in school

or who lack schooling may also have low-literacy skills, a further obstacle to involvement. These parents cannot help with homework or may be ashamed to write notes to the teacher.

One of the most frequent causes of poor relationships between parents and schools is a tendency for schools to contact the home only when a crisis or problem occurs (Christenson, 1992; Mavrogenes, 1990; Moles, 1987). Such communication is discouraging to families and does not promote positive parental involvement. When every communication from the school is a negative experience, parents quite naturally may seek to avoid the school rather than participate in school activities.

This may not be entirely the fault of teachers. The clock has been cited as a barrier to effective home-school communication as administrators rarely allow teachers the time required to adequately reach-out to parents (Christenson, 1992; Greenberg, 1989; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992). Very often, teachers must write their notes or squeeze their phone calls into during short "preparation" times or lunch periods. This makes meaningful and two-way dialog difficult. Times for teachers to meet with the parents who can come to school are few and they are often too short in duration to accomplish what is needed.

Furthermore, teachers may lack training in parent involvement (Christenson, 1992; Greenberg, 1989; Hiltonsmith, 1993; Leitch & Tangri, 1988). Parent involvement is rarely discussed in teacher-preparation courses or in school staff development sessions. Thus teachers continue to rely on the traditional methods (e.g., notes home) that were probably used when they were students. Such methods tend to promote one-way communication rather than the two-way dialog that is seen as essential to effective parent involvement (Dunst & Trivette, 1987; Christenson, 1992; Greenberg, 1989;

Hiltonsmith, 1993). One-way communication often serves to limit and discourage parent involvement.

It has been suggested that effective parent involvement is more likely to occur if there is a match between family type and specific approaches to home-school collaboration (Hiltonsmith, 1993). Teachers who use only one method of contacting the home or who have only a few stock recommendations for parents, may be missing many families who want to be involved. This is illustrated by the work of Spiegel, et al. (1993). They questioned whether parent perceptions of what promotes literacy development were different in high-literacy parents and in low-literacy parents. The authors report that low-literacy parents and high-literacy parents did indeed have different perceptions about their roles in promoting literacy. Low-literacy parents tended to place more emphasis on events and materials rather than on their parental role as model and helper. Spiegel, et al. suggest that when teachers' efforts to involve the home run counter to the parent's view of their role, the parents will not follow through with suggestions and will not stay involved.

The causes of poor parent participation discussed in the literature are consistent with the suspected causes of uneven participation rates in the writer's school. Both school factors and home factors are seen as obstacles to effective parent involvement. Also significant is that the literature provides support for the link between parental involvement and the educational success of children.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum. As described in Chapter II, the problem is that many families of "at risk" first and second graders are not participating in home-school activities. The overall goal of this practicum was to increase family participation in home-school activities, specifically targeting families of first and second graders who have been identified as being "at risk" and whose families have a history of non-participation in home-school activities. It was expected that families would become active participants in their children's schooling and literacy development and that teachers would expand their repertoire of strategies to encourage family involvement.

Expected Outcomes

1. Records indicate that only 13 out of 41 non-neighborhood families participated in the 93-94 Parents as Reading Partners (PARP) program; at the conclusion of this practicum records will show that all non-neighborhood families of first and second graders participated in the 94-95 PARP program.

2. Records indicate that only 75 out of 89 neighborhood families participated in the 93-94 PARP program; at the conclusion of this practicum

records will show that all neighborhood families of first and second graders participated in the 94-95 PARP program.

3. During the 93-94 school year only 16 out of 49 minority families participated in the PARP program; at the conclusion of this practicum, records will show that all minority families participated in the 94-95 PARP program.

4. Observations at two PTA sponsored activities during the 93-94 school year revealed that 0 non-neighborhood or minority parents participated; at the conclusion of this practicum, visitor logs and observations will show that at least 15 out of 41 families of non-neighborhood children participated in at least one PTA sponsored event during the 94-95 school year.

5. Interviews with teachers indicate that 0 out of 6 teachers felt that home-school communication with families of children from non-neighborhood homes is satisfactory; at the conclusion of this practicum, interview data will show that 6 out of 6 teachers feel that home school communication has improved and is satisfactory.

6. Interviews with teachers indicate that currently only 1 out of 6 teachers used methods other than traditional notes and phone calls; at the conclusion of this practicum, interview data will show that 6 out of 6 first and second grade teachers have used different methods of communication with the home.

Measurement of Outcomes

Outcomes will be measured through observations, interviews, and written records regarding student and parent participation in various activities. Outcomes 1, 2, and 4 will be measured by reviewing records of PARP participation of each first and second grade student. These records will be kept on a computer database and included information regarding the student's grade level, ethnicity, and home school.

Outcome 3 will be measured through observations and a review of attendance logs. In addition to observations made by this writer during PTA-sponsored activities, the PTA will be asked to keep a record of parents who participate in either the organizing or supervising of activities. The visitor's log in the school office will be consulted to keep track of which parents attended activities.

Structured interviews (see Appendix A) will be conducted with the first and second grade teachers following the implementation period to assess their perception of the status of parent involvement and their methods of contacting and involving the home (outcomes 5 and 6).

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem is that many families of "at risk" first and second graders are not participating in home-school activities such as Parents as Reading Partners (PARP) and PTA-sponsored activities. The literature provides many examples of schools which have successfully developed programs to involve parents of elementary school children. As they are reviewed, certain "common threads" will appear evident and the reader will note how each program addresses one or more of the "barriers" to parent involvement (see Chapter II). As Christenson (1992) notes, barriers should be viewed as opportunities.

Several schools have attempted to involve parents in their children's learning through participation in parent training workshops (Handel, 1992; Mavrogenes, 1990; Nichols, 1992; Quintero & Velarde, 1990). Workshops are designed to provide parents with a non-threatening venue to interact with school personnel and to give parents practical ideas of literacy and home-learning activities they can do with their children. Mavrogenes (1990) discusses several elements of good training workshops, including "a warm and accepting attitude, presentation of rationale, modeling, practice, and feedback" (p. 6). She stresses that workshops for low-income parents must

allow for demonstration, practice, participation, and discussion of specific activities that parents can take home and do. The literature provides many examples of possible activities that can be integrated into parent workshops, such as giving parents calendars suggesting daily or weekly home activities, providing parents with children's books and teaching them how to read with their children, guiding parents toward adult education opportunities, reading a recipe and cooking a new food with their children, and establishing a story-telling time to facilitate language skills. Mavrogenes also suggests that workshops may be better attended if held in community centers or in parent's homes.

Nichols (1992) implemented these ideas in an urban, low income school setting, inviting parents of kindergartners to participate in a series of workshops. She accommodated diverse parent schedules by giving parents the opportunity to attend either morning or evening sessions. Each workshop session had a specific theme and included activities as well as parent discussion. She reports that parent involvement in school activities increased following participation in the workshops.

Quintero and Velarde (1990), working with an Hispanic population, provided parents with workshop opportunities to improve their own literacy skills as well as training in fostering the literacy development of their children. The authors not only report increases in both adult and children's literacy skills, but more importantly, they report a new level of confidence and involvement on the part of parents. The sessions included parents and children together in a discussion and activity format similar to that suggested by Mavrogenes.

Handel (1992) reports that "Family Literacy Workshops" were a major component of a Partnership for Family Reading project between Newark, NJ

schools and Montclair State College. The philosophy of the project held that families are a positive resource that must be tapped. A series of workshops were conducted for any family member (not only a parent) who wanted to attend. Teachers acted as "guides" who introduced families to children's books and instructed families in fun ways to read aloud and discuss books with their children. Families were then allowed to borrow the books to take home and read with their children. Workshops were held throughout the school year. The author notes that at the end of the year families reported spending more time reading with their children. Some parents went on to enroll in GED programs to further improve their skills. Teachers reported that children seemed more excited about books and reading, although the teachers expressed concerned about how time-consuming the project was. The author reports that the lack of evening sessions restricted the numbers of families who could participate.

Shockley (1994), a first grade teacher, used a different approach to involve parents in home-literacy activities. On the first day of the school year she asked parents to "tell me about your child" and established "home response journals" with the parents. In these journals, parent were encouraged to write about the books they were reading with their children and communicate their feelings about the reading development of their child. Families were also asked to contribute a "family story" to be included in a class book about families. Shockley provided books for families to read with their children and she responded to the journals daily. She reports 100% family participation in a culturally diverse and low socioeconomic classroom. Shockley indicates that success was achieved because "the project was born of genuine respect for parent's efficacy as their children's first and primary

teachers" (p. 501). It is possible that success was also due to the "personal touch" of the teacher's individual responses to each family.

Shockley's statement reflects Epstein's (1987) studies of parent involvement. Epstein identified teachers who were leaders in getting parents involved and found that these teachers actively recruited all parents regardless of parent education level. Teachers who expected that all parents could and would be involved in their children's education, were successful in getting parents involved. Teachers who held different sets of expectations for different parents were not.

In Tennessee, parent-school partnerships were established with the goal of introducing parents to ways they could help their children acquire basic skills (Lueder, 1989). The schools hired home/school coordinators to function as liaisons between home and school. The coordinator made home visits, addressed individual family needs, and worked to build the trust of families. Parents were then invited to "weekly parent club" sessions where they were introduced to specific activities they could do at home with their children. The author reports that parents responded favorably to the program, but adds that the manner of invitation to parents proved to be critical. Lueder suggests that invitations be offered more than once and that they convey a message of respect and high expectations. Success was achieved through personal involvement and genuine interest in the family.

A different approach is discussed by Bauch (1989). His school attempted to improve the communication between home and school by using available technology making school information accessible 24 hours a day. Through the use of answering machines and computer-based calling, parents could get information about homework, subjects being taught in class, and

strategies to help at home. An obstacle to the effectiveness of this strategy is the lack of telephones in many homes.

Seeley (1989) describes two schools in California where there has been a successful effort to involve poor and minority parents. He suggests that the school's success was not due to the specific activities that the school sponsored (e.g., parent workshops, newsletters) but rather to a paradigm shift away from the "delegation model." Seeley believes that the long standing practice of society delegating all educational responsibility to school and ignoring the role of the family has been responsible for creating the gap between home and school. The two schools he describes succeeded in achieving strong parent involvement only when they began to see the necessity of family involvement. When they established collaborative (two-way) relationships with families and began building on the strengths of families, the families became true partners in the educational process.

At another California school, the staff has tried to move away from the traditional practice of negative notes and phone calls home only when there is a problem, and has established a formal system of recognizing and rewarding students and their parents (Davis, 1989). Each week, two students from each classroom are selected to receive a special award (Best Student of the Week, Best Reader of the Week). Parents are phoned immediately by someone who speaks the home language, and told exactly what the student did to deserve this award. In this way, every parent receives positive feedback from the school. The staff believes that they have been successful in securing the cooperation and involvement of families because of the positive communications home. As Davis states, "It's hard to resist a plea for involvement when the school has acknowledged your child" (1989, p. 22).

Efforts to involve parents also take a commitment to "nondeficit" thinking (Christenson, 1992; Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990). Rather than spend time focusing on why parents are not involved, Fredericks and Rasinski suggest that schools must spend their energies finding the strengths of each family. Their survey of schools with successful parent involvement efforts finds that schools with successful parent involvement programs make involvement a school-wide effort, involve the whole family (not only parents), regularly recognize students and parents, and work to make the school a comfortable place for families. Frederick and Rasinski state, "The distinguishing factor that appears time and time again in successful and effective parent involvement programs is the fact that all parents are aggressively recruited and involved . . " (emphasis added, 1989, p. 425). In the schools described above, extraordinary efforts were made by staff to recognize and involve families in the schooling of the children. The literature suggests that it is when staff believes that parents must be involved and are able to make a true commitment in time and effort, that parent involvement in the schools is secured.

It is clear from this sample of parent involvement programs that attitude and commitment on the part of school staff is of paramount importance. Each of the above programs successfully broke down barriers and helped parents become comfortable and feel welcome in the school. Each program originated from the belief that parent involvement is desirable and that parents can help their children. Christenson correctly notes that "home-school collaboration is an attitude, not an activity" (1992, p. 15).

Teachers may need encouragement to develop such an attitude. As noted in Chapter II, lack of effective parent involvement programs has been linked to the absence of teacher training in parent involvement strategies and

home-school collaboration. Consequently, staff development is often recommended as an important component of any new program aimed at increasing parent involvement (APA, 1993; Henderson, 1988; McAfee, 1987; Moles, 1987; Rich, 1988; Williams & Chavkin, 1989). Training should focus on the principles of collaboration (two-way communication) and on strategies to empower families. Since the objective is to change teachers' behavior and practices, the format of training sessions should not follow the traditional "inservice" model of one-shot, one-hour presentations, but should be on-going and actively involve teachers (Schmid, Korinek, & McAdams, 1985). In this way, teachers are empowered to become part of program development (Greenberg, 1989; McAfee, 1987; Seeley, 1989). McAfee (1987) warns that if teachers see parent involvement as "just one more thing I have to do," their efforts will be half-hearted and disingenuous, an attitude that will surely communicate itself to the parents and serve as a barrier to involvement. Teachers need to know that involving parents can have benefits to teachers, not only in terms of increased achievement of their students, but also in terms of parent's perceptions of them. Epstein (1987) notes that teachers who involve parents receive higher ratings by parents than teachers who did not.

In view of suggestions that different family types may respond differently to parent involvement efforts (Hiltonsmith, 1993; Spiegel, et al., 1993), it is important that teachers are also encouraged to develop a variety of activities to offer parents. Strategies can then be "matched" to individual families. This requires an individual assessment of family styles and needs which means additional time and commitment get to know each family.

One of the ways this has been accomplished is by assigning a home-school coordinator to the project, as was done in the Tennessee model described above (Lueder, 1989). Others have also suggested that newly

developed programs have a coordinator whose task is to oversee the project, ensure that there is ongoing administrative support (necessary to obtain space, time, and money), and ensure that the program's momentum continues after the workshops and training, (Mavrogenes, 1990; McAfee, 1987).

Successful parent involvement programs based on collaboration and recognition of the strengths of families do not just happen, they must be nurtured. Christenson (1992) sums up essential components of successful efforts. She states that home-school collaboration works when (a) parents and educators build new relationships, (b) there is an effective and caring leadership, (c) there are many ways for parents to get involved, (d) there is communication between parents, teachers, and students, (e) schools remove some of the barriers to participation, and (f) connections are made with other community agencies. This last component is especially applicable to the writer's school. As noted above in the description of the community, this village has obtained grants to fund community projects that could be accessed to assist families if parents are aware of them and are encouraged to participate. As Christenson notes, connections need to be made between the school and the appropriate community resources. It is likely that the school will need to take the initiative to make the connection and facilitate parents' participation.

Description of Selected Solution

The causes of the lack of parental involvement in this school are multiple, therefore it was necessary to develop a multifaceted solution strategy.

1. The literature reviewed above clearly demonstrates that teachers' attitudes and skills are pivotal in getting families involved. Teachers in this school have not had formal opportunities to discuss the importance of parent

involvement or to develop skills to involve all parents. To address this problem, the solution plan included a staff development component.

2. The literature also suggests that parents, particularly low-literacy or minority parents such as are targeted in this practicum, want to help their children but may not participate in school-based activities because they don't know what to do. There are many examples of parent workshops that have been used successfully to address this issue (Handel, 1992; Mavrogenes, 1990; Nichols, 1992; Quintero & Velarde, 1990). Therefore, one component of this solution plan was parent training workshops.

3. The literature suggests that different families may need different approaches in order to feel comfortable in school and school-like settings (Hiltonsmith, 1993; Spiegel, et al., 1993). The families that are targeted in this practicum are from diverse backgrounds and presumably have diverse needs. The solution plan included a component which could allow individual family needs to be met through the development of Individual Family Plans.

4. The literature also makes it clear that parent involvement does not happen by itself and that a coordinator is required to spearhead the effort, keep it going, and facilitate solutions to problems as they develop (Christenson, 1992; Lueder, 1989; Mavrogenes, 1990; McAfee, 1987). Therefore, a component of this solution strategy provided for a person to coordinate the program.

In summary then, the solution strategy developed for this school included: coordination of the program, staff development, parent workshops, and the development of individual family plans.

Coordinator

The writer, in her role as school psychologist, functioned as the coordinator of the program and oversaw all aspects of the implementation.

The coordinator was responsible for making arrangements for the staff development sessions, arranging for parent workshops and notifying parents, and evaluating the program at the end of the eight month implementation period.

Staff Development

The teachers at this school already recognized the importance of home-school projects and supported several activities in the past (e.g., Pizza Hut Book-It, PARP, Summer reading). Now that the non-participating families were identified, efforts could focus on reaching these homes. Three staff development sessions for first and second grade teachers were planned, each with a separate agenda.

The goals of the first staff meeting were to introduce the teachers to the goals and objectives of this practicum, increase their knowledge of parent involvement literature (reasons for lack of involvement and components of successful involvement projects), and develop a plan for teacher action. Teachers were provided with handouts listing activities and strategies culled from the literature, and asked to discuss the feasibility of their use in this school.

The goal of the second staff development session was to write the plans that the teachers agree to use. For example, teachers might decide to send "Happygrams" to every child's family every two weeks noting an achievement the child has made, or they might develop a monthly calendar of activities to send home. It was possible that each teacher would develop different strategies for use in her class or that each teacher would develop different strategies for different families. The only requirements for teacher action plans would be that every family is included and that the teachers develop the plans themselves. The plans would then conform to two

commonly found recommendations in the literature: high expectations for every family and teacher empowerment in the process of increasing parent involvement.

The goals of the third staff development session were to evaluate the use of the teacher action plans and to develop specific strategies to involve all parents in the PARP program. If the teacher action plans were not seen as successful, teachers could discuss and develop alternative strategies. In regard to getting ready for the PARP program, topics might include making sure that the invitations to participate are in a language understood in the home, developing plans to follow-up on parents who do not immediately respond, and providing books for students who do not have a home library.

Parent Workshops

Five parent sessions were planned, each with a specific topic and activity. Invitations to the sessions were made in multiple ways: flyers home, posters in public housing projects, telephone calls, and enlisting the help of community agency persons who work in the neighborhoods. Since some of the children in this school live with persons other than their parents (e.g., aunts, grandmothers), the invitations stressed that the workshops were not limited to mothers and fathers; any adult in the family was welcome to participate. These workshops were open to all interested families of first and second graders, not only to the families that had been targeted. It was hoped that these workshops would provide an opportunity for parents to mix socially, as well as to learn new skills.

A site for the first two meetings was sought within the neighborhood where many of the targeted families live as these parents that do not typically come to the school. It was expected that after the first two meetings, parents could be encouraged come to the school building. Meetings were to be

scheduled in the afternoon or evening, if possible. If meetings must be held at the school during school hours, it was hoped that funds for transportation and child care could be requested through one of the grant programs that already exists. Provision for a Spanish speaking co-leader was made by involving the school district's coordinator of English as a Second Language.

The primary goal of the parent workshops was to provide parents with activities that they could do at home to assist their child in acquiring early literacy skills. A secondary goal was to help families feel comfortable in the school and take on a more participatory role in other school activities (such as PTA-sponsored events).

The following topics were suggested for each workshop session:

Workshop 1: Family Storytime: Storytelling, popular children's books, and reading aloud.

Workshop 2: Make It or Bake It: Holiday projects that foster literacy development.

Workshop 3: ReadingLand: Making board games that foster literacy development.

Workshop 4: PARP: What is it? How can you make it successful?

Workshop 5: We Did It! Sharing achievements.

Individual Family Plan

Families that have been targeted were contacted personally by the coordinator and invited to develop an individual plan to help their child develop literacy skills. This plan might include activities that they had learned through the workshops, getting a library card for the family, or contacting a community service agency to provide assistance in adult literacy skills, English as a Second Language skills, or after-school/weekend activities. The plan was to

be developed collaboratively by the writer and the family member and recorded on the Individual Family Plan for Literacy form (see Appendix B).

Report of Action Taken

Preliminaries

At the beginning of the school year, the writer set up a meeting with the building principal to discuss scheduling the planned staff development sessions and to investigate funding sources for refreshments for parent sessions. All phases of the practicum were described to the principal and she agreed to permit the writer to address the staff during the first faculty meeting of the year. She requested that future meetings be scheduled through the school secretary who had access to the general school calendar.

At the first faculty meeting, the coordinator presented an overview of the practicum as well as a rationale for making the effort to involve more families. Since this is a school with high academic expectations for its students, findings that family involvement was positively related to higher academic achievement levels were stressed (see Christenson, 1992 and Henderson, 1988).

The leadership of the PTA was contacted by the writer and asked to encourage the involvement of all parents. This encouragement was provided during their presentation at the annual Back-To-School night in September. A log was kept in the school office of all visitors and the secretary was informed that the writer would be checking it to determine the participation of out-of-district parents at school functions.

The writer then contacted persons in the community to inform them of the school's new efforts to increase parent involvement and to investigate possible sites for parent workshops. The writer held meetings with the Coordinator of the Even Start Program (an early intervention family literacy

program funded by a grant obtained through the school district), the school district's coordinator of Bilingual & ESL programs, and representative parents. Although only a few of the families that had been targeted for this practicum were participating in the Even Start Program, the Coordinator of that program was helpful in providing a site for workshops (the YMCA) that was frequented by Hispanic families who were involved with Even Start and offered to allow families attending the parent workshops use of their child care facilities. The writer obtained a second site for workshops (the activity room of a public housing development) through the efforts of a mother who had not previously participated in home-school projects but who became very excited about the prospects of someone from the school coming to her neighborhood. The interest of this mother was very encouraging and the writer made sure that teachers knew of her cooperation and interest.

Parent Workshops

Four workshops were held throughout the school year (scheduling difficulties forced the cancellation of the proposed fifth workshop). As planned, the first two workshops were held at different sites throughout the community while the second two were held at the school. As will be seen below, different strategies were employed to inform families of the workshops. Copies of the written notices can be found in Appendix C while descriptions of each workshop can be found in Appendix D.

Workshop 1: Since it was judged to be highly unlikely that the Hispanic or White population would travel to the predominately African-American public housing facility, and equally unlikely that the African-American or Hispanic population would travel to the school building, it was decided to conduct the first workshop at all three sites (the public housing facility, the YMCA, and the school). It was expected that the Hispanic population would most likely attend

the workshops at the YMCA and therefore the school district's coordinator of Bilingual/ESL programs was invited to participate and to translate. It was originally hoped that workshops could be offered during the evening hours, but two of the facilities were not available in the evening and the third could only provide child care and a translator during the daytime hours. It was decided to hold two of the workshops around the noon-hour so that working parents might be able to attend during their lunch hours.

Notices were distributed to parents by classroom teachers at the annual "Back-To-School" night, sent home again with the children several days before the workshop, and sent to the Even Start Coordinator and to the contact at the public housing project for posting at those sites. In addition, the coordinator telephoned the English-speaking families two nights before the first workshop to invite them personally.

This first workshop was held the seventh week of school and was entitled "You Can Make A Difference." This workshop, like all those to follow, was designed to be participatory and non-threatening. A crate of children's books was brought to the workshop and those who attended were able to look at the books, talk about what kinds of books are appropriate for first and second grade children, and learn the new strategies that teachers are using to teach reading. Other literacy building activities, such as oral storytelling, were also described. In preparation for this workshop, a small booklet entitled, "Making Your Child A Reader" (Appendix E) was prepared by the writer and the reading teacher, with portions translated into Spanish by the district Bilingual & ESL coordinator. This booklet was distributed and discussed at the parent workshop so that the parents would have a reminder of the things that were presented.

Workshop 2: A second parent workshop was held during the 13th week of school. In order to address the low turnout at the first workshop, additional strategies for disseminating the notices were employed. Since some parents who had been phoned for the first workshop indicated that they never received the notices sent home with their children, this time the targeted families were also sent notices through the US mail. Representatives from Even Start and the public housing complex were sent additional notices to post. Since the attendance at the YMCA site had been zero for the first workshop, that site was dropped and the second workshop was held at the remaining two sites with the Spanish translator available for the school site. The title of this workshop was "Making the Holidays Fun: Make It and Bake It (And Help Your Child Learn)." It was designed as a hands-on session in which participants created a holiday decoration while the coordinator demonstrated how the activity could foster reading and literacy skills. Family members were given specific examples of how to organize the activity so that it could foster listening skills, sequencing and following direction skills, and vocabulary development. It was noted that the participants who came to the session seemed to enjoy the activity a great deal and took away materials so that they could do the activity at home. A second booklet was also prepared and given to participants which contained holiday stories as well as other activities.

Workshop 3: Due to personal scheduling difficulties of the writer, the third parent workshop could not be held as originally planned. It was postponed until later in the year and what was to have been the fourth parent workshop went on as scheduled coinciding with the first week of the PARP program (see below). Since the mailing of notices had not increased attendance, this strategy was dropped and invitations were extended through

phone calls to parents on the targeted list. This had the added benefit of permitting an additional personal contact with the families. The topic of this workshop was "PARP: What is it? How to Make it Successful." This workshop was designed to make parents comfortable with the program and to facilitate their successful participation. Specific objectives including introducing parents to the library, finding out which parents needed books sent home with the children, and letting families know that it was acceptable to read in Spanish and that someone other than a parent could read with the child (Uncle, older sibling, etc.). This workshop was scheduled to be held only at the school since it was expected that the parents would have had enough positive contact with school staff to be more comfortable coming to the school.

Workshop 4: The fourth parent workshop was held during the 33rd week of school. Notices were sent home with the students three days before the workshop. Once again the only site was the school building. The topic was the originally planned third workshop, "Hop Aboard the Train to ReadingLand". The objective was to introduce games that could be made by a parent and child with only paper and crayons that would foster literacy skills and enjoyment of reading. The format of the session was hands on with the participants creating their own game board during the session.

Staff Development

Scheduling the first staff development meeting with the first and second grade teachers proved very difficult. Curriculum meetings, district assessment meetings, and principal's meetings (all of which took priority over the writer's meetings) forced the meeting to be rescheduled three times. It was finally held the week following the first parent workshop. The goal of the meeting was to review the goals and objectives of the program, sensitize the teachers to the various causes of poor parent involvement, and challenge them to

begin thinking about strategies they could develop to increase parent involvement. A short list of strategies and activities culled from the literature was prepared for the teachers and it was expected that teachers would have the opportunity to discuss the strategies. It was also expected that the teachers would start to develop involvement activities and discuss them with each other throughout the next month. Plans were changed somewhat when it became very clear at the beginning of the meeting that the teachers were feeling overwhelmed. Several comments were heard as teachers walked in suggesting that they were anticipating this meeting in negative terms (e.g., "Let's get this started so we can get out of here"). There seemed to be a general feeling that increasing parent involvement was dependent on things that were beyond their control. For example, the teachers unanimously felt that a big barrier to parent involvement was that notices were rarely sent home in Spanish. Teachers also expressed doubt that they would have enough time to devote to making more positive phone contacts or sending positive notes home, although all the teachers expressed agreement regarding the value of such activities. Several teachers indicated that they would like to have parent volunteers in their classrooms but that they felt that the building administrator had discouraged this in the past. It was clear that the teachers needed this opportunity to "vent" before anything productive was going to happen.

Following this "venting" opportunity, the teachers seemed better able to focus their energies on positive actions. Strategies to ensure that notices went home in Spanish were discussed including the possibility of getting a set of "generic" letters translated for common things such as, "Please call me for a conference", "The class is going on a field trip," and "A classmate has chickenpox." Regarding the parent volunteer issue, it was suggested that

teachers come up with specific proposals and that the coordinator would present them to the principal. The staff was assured that the administration believed in family involvement and would support their efforts. The writer also offered to assist the teachers with phone calls if they found that they were unable to reach the home. Despite concluding the meeting on more positive note than it began, the teachers made it very clear that they preferred not to meet formally after school. As a result, plans to hold two more such meetings were revised and it was agreed that the teachers would have individual meetings with the coordinator and that only one more formal meeting would be held.

Following the meeting with the teachers, the school district's coordinator of Bilingual & ESL programs was contacted and generic notices in Spanish were obtained. A note was sent to teachers indicating that these notes were available in the school psychologist's office for their use. Examples of positive parent notices was also placed in the school psychologist's office. Since the only phone available for teacher's use is located in the school psychologist's office, it was felt that this location was an appropriate place to keep such resources.

The writer continued to collaborate with the first and second grade teachers on a regular basis throughout the remainder of the year. Lists of students who were struggling and were not turning in homework or not participating in home-school activities were continually updated through these conversations with the teachers. Teachers were provided names of those families who had participated in the parent workshops so that they could reinforce the parent's efforts. Copies of materials given to the workshop participants were made available to the classroom teachers in the school

psychologist's office. Strategies to provide positive feedback to parents were individually discussed with each teacher.

The second formal staff meeting for first and second grade teachers was held the week before PARP began. Sensitive both to the teachers' dislike of afterschool meetings and to their difficulty finding time to attend, this meeting was scheduled during the teachers' lunch hour. To circumvent contractual issues regarding lunch meetings the writer provided an incentive: free lunch to all who attended. All teachers attended. The purpose of this meeting was to share the strategies of involving parents that were working and to further target those families of children who were seen as most likely to be non-participators. Teachers readily shared information about strategies that were and were not working for individual children. The teachers appeared to feel most comfortable talking about specific children and this was encouraged since literature suggests that teachers change their behavior more readily when strategies are discussed in terms of individual students (Safran & Barcikowski, 1984).

Individual Family Plans

In an attempt to individualize the ways in which families would feel comfortable with increasing their role in their child's literacy development, families on the targeted list (those who had not participated in the PARP program during the previous year and were considered "at-risk") were phoned throughout the school year and invited to meet with the writer. The order of calls to parents was based on conversations that the writer had with classroom teachers. Those families of students who the teachers felt were having the most difficulty were called first. Those who accepted the invitation met with the writer and discussed specific activities that they and school could do to help their child improve his/her reading skills. Examples of activities that

families agreed to do included: contacting and enrolling in community programs for literacy or job training, taking advantage of free community programs (such as the free reading clinic at the public library), taking the child to a doctor to investigate possible vision, hearing or other medical problems, participating in PTA activities, volunteering in the classroom, and setting up the home environment to facilitate the completion of reading homework. Examples of activities that the school agreed to do included: providing remedial reading, referring the child for an evaluation to rule out a serious learning disability, lending the family books to read, and establishing a communication notebook between home and school. Invitations to these meetings continued to be extended to families throughout the eight month implementation of the practicum in the order of need established by classroom teachers in collaboration with the writer.

Additional Activities

In January, the writer joined the committee to plan the Parents As Reading Partner program (PARP) to be held in March. Parents As Reading Partners is an annual program sponsored by the school district. Each elementary school develops a theme and activities to support the program. Parents are asked to read with their child on a regular basis (usually 5 out of seven nights per week) for the month. Since PARP is a parent activity, the writer suggested that the Committee include parents. The committee agreed and 2 parents joined and remained highly active in planning and carrying out the PARP program. Committee members came up with several ideas that would facilitate better participation and allow teachers an opportunity to follow-up with those families who had not participated in the past. For example, the Committee decided that the reading "logs" be turned in each week so that follow-up calls could be made to those families that were having difficulty

participating in the activity and any obstacles could be overcome (such as families not having enough reading material in the home). Returning the reading "logs" every week also permitted the positive reinforcement of families who were participating. The committee, composed of several teachers who were participating in this practicum, established the policy that the person who read with the child did not have to be a parent, but could be any family member since several of the students do not live with their parents. The Committee also established a goal of 100% participation and although some staff members seemed skeptical, the Committee continued to reiterate the expectation that this goal could be reached. The writer offered to make any necessary follow-up home contacts with the families of students in grades one and two which prompted other Committee members to "adopt" other grade levels.

Since one of the issues that many parents discussed during workshop sessions was after school programming, the writer initiated a relationship between the school and one of the afterschool programs that helps children with schoolwork. A visit to the center was made and the program director was given information about the school's efforts to involve parents. The new methods of teaching reading that the school was using were also shared. This visit corresponded with the PARP program and the director offered to lend books to the children who needed reading material. She also offered to supply encouragement to parents when they picked up their children in the evening.

Data Collection

At the conclusion of the eight month implementation period, the writer met with individual teachers and conducted the Teacher Interview. The

visitor's log was matched to the days that the PTA held special events and data from the PARP program was collected.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

At the beginning of this practicum data indicated that many families of first and second grade students who lived outside the traditional neighborhood-school boundaries and/or were members of minority groups (African-American and Hispanic) were not participating in home-school activities. A target list of families was established and a comprehensive solution strategy to increase family participation in home-school activities was implemented. The solution strategy consisted of (1) parent workshops to help families understand how they can be involved, (2) staff development and support for parent involvement efforts, and (3) individual meetings with families to develop Individual Family Plans. It was expected that families would become active participants in their children's schooling and literacy development and that teachers would expand their repertoire of strategies to encourage family involvement.

Six regular education teachers of first and second graders were invited to participate in staff meetings and to develop plans to foster increased parent involvement. Four of the 6 teachers attended both sessions. Teachers were given an opportunity to discuss both general strategies to increase parent involvement and to discuss individual families who needed to be targeted. At

the end of the 8 month implementation period the first and second grade teachers were interviewed to gather data regarding strategies they had used and their perceptions regarding the parent involvement program.

Four parent workshops were held throughout the 8 month implementation period. The first two workshops were presented at multiple sites to encourage attendance of those families who were uncomfortable coming to the school or who had transportation difficulties associated with coming to the school. The second two meetings were held at the school. Families were contacted through flyers sent home through the school, flyers posted in neighborhood housing projects, individual mailings, and personal phone calls. Despite these efforts, attendance at the workshops was erratic. Minority and non-neighborhood families appeared to respond best to personal phone calls while the White and neighborhood families tended to respond to notices sent home. The first workshop, presented in three locations, was attended by 8 families. Attendance at the second workshop, presented at two locations, dropped to 6. No one attended the third workshop held only at the school, but 22 parents attended the fourth workshop, also held only at the school.

Fifteen English speaking families were invited to individual meetings to discuss their children's reading progress and to develop literacy plans. Responses from families were varied and included those who appeared grateful for the opportunity, those who were reluctant, and those who flatly refused. Six families accepted and participated in making individual literacy plans.

A review of expected and actual outcomes follows:

1. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that records would indicate that all non-neighborhood families of first and

second graders participated in the 94-95 PARP program. PARP records now indicate that 38 of the 44 families successfully completed the PARP program during the 94-95 school year. While this falls short of the objective, it demonstrates a rather substantial increase in participation of non-neighborhood families over the results of the 93-94 PARP program when only 13 of 41 families successfully completed the program.

2. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that records would indicate that all neighborhood families of first and second graders participated in the 94-95 PARP program. PARP records now indicate that 72 of the 78 families who live within the neighborhood successfully participated in the PARP program. While the objective was not fully achieved, the results demonstrate an increase in participation (72 out of 78 as compared to 75 out of 89).

3. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that records would indicate that all minority families participated in the 94-95 PARP program. Results of the PARP program indicated that 38 out of 47 minority (African-American and Hispanic) families participated in the 94-95 PARP program. While the stated objective was not met, the results clearly demonstrate an increase in participation of minorities (only 16 out of 49 families completed the program in 93-94).

4. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that records would indicate that at least 15 out of 44 families of non-neighborhood children participated in at least one PTA sponsored event during the 94-95 school year. This objective was not met. Sign-in sheets in the school office and interviews with PTA representatives indicate that only one family actively participated in planning activities but that 11 families attended at least one function. Results indicate that although there is

somewhat greater participation in activities, the non-neighborhood parents continue to be uninvolved in planning traditional PTA events.

5. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that interview data will show that 6 out of 6 teachers feel that home school communication has improved and is satisfactory. This objective was partially met. Interview data indicated that while only 2 teachers feel that communication now is satisfactory, 5 out of 6 feel that the situation has improved. Teachers reported that homework is being completed and returned more consistently and that parents seem to be reading to their children more than in previous years. Teachers indicated that they are still concerned that communications are not routinely sent home in Spanish and that this restricts the participation of those families who only speak Spanish. Teachers also indicated that they would like to see an increase in administrative support for parent involvement programs. When the teachers were presented with the data indicating that there were substantial increases in participation in the PARP program, they seemed surprised.

6. At the end of the eight-month implementation period it was expected that interview data would show that 6 out of 6 first and second grade teachers have used different methods of communication with the home. This objective was also partially met. During the interview, 6 out of 6 teachers described making more frequent contacts with the home, modifying activities so that all families can successfully participate, and communicating more positive things to families. However, when asked specifically "did you use any new strategies this year to communicate with the home?" all of the teachers responded "no". Apparently the teachers did not recognize their changed actions as being strategies.

Discussion

Breaking Barriers

This practicum was designed to address the problem of low involvement of minority and non-neighborhood families in home-school activities. Efforts to address the known barriers to family involvement were made through a variety of activities, resulting in mixed outcomes. Positive outcomes included substantial gains in the participation of minority and non-neighborhood families in the PARP program, and teacher reports of increased family participation in other academic-type activities (such as homework). On the other hand, parent participation in workshops and PTA activities was minimal and few families responded to invitations to meet individually and develop plans for enhancing family literacy. Additionally, teachers reported that they did not use different strategies to involve parents. These observations beg the question, if parents did not participate in workshops and if teachers did not use different strategies, what then was responsible for the increase in participation in PARP and other activities?

A careful analysis of the events that took place during the 8 month implementation period and, more importantly, the responses of teachers and families to the events, suggests that many of the barriers to family participation in home-school activities can be overcome as a result of dynamic interactions between school staff and families. Although the practicum was designed to consist of specific activities (parent workshops, staff development meetings, and individual planning conferences), it does not appear that these activities were responsible for the positive outcomes. Indeed, barriers continue to exist which prevent such activities from being successful. Non-neighborhood families do not yet feel comfortable coming to the school as demonstrated by families only attended workshops in their own neighborhood

and the poor participation in PTA activities. Class bias and "institutional racism" (Greenberg, 1989) continues to be felt by the minority families. The school continues to define the parent's role rather narrowly and does not yet encourage parent volunteering or "dropping in." Although staff development opportunities were available during this practicum, there was not strong administrative support for attendance and therefore teachers still rely on rather traditional strategies of communicating with families. Time is very limited as teachers are involved in many after school curriculum meetings.

On the other hand, some barriers were broken during the implementation of this practicum. Teachers report that they sent more positive messages to families. There were greater opportunities for two-way communication as teachers and families had more personal phone conversations and the workshops offered time for discussion. The coordinator went into the community to offer the workshops and to meet with community leaders, thereby reducing the distance between home and school. Although the poor turnout for parent workshops and conferences was disappointing, Weiss and Edwards (1992) remind us that the immediate goal of a parent involvement program is not to have parents active in the school building, but is to have parents support the school's efforts in the home (e.g., homework, reading, getting to school on time). In this respect the practicum was successful as families who had not previously participated in home-school literacy activities (e.g., PARP) were now participating. But the practicum activities (staff development meetings, parent workshops, conferences) were merely a vehicle for an interaction between home and school. The dynamic responsible for the positive outcomes was this interaction.

The dynamic interaction can be illustrated by a deceptively simple formula: Leadership + Attention = Momentum + Action. Leadership is necessary to initiate and sustain the family involvement effort. A leader communicates the vision of how things could be and then gives attention to those who can make it happen. This personal attention and articulation of the vision generates a momentum for change and action. By examining what happened during this practicum, the above formula can be better understood.

The role of the coordinator proved to be a very crucial component to the overall success of the program. Assuming one of the characteristics of leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), the coordinator articulated her vision of a school with strong family involvement. Announcing the goals of the practicum (vision) at a faculty meeting accomplished little. Teachers initially appeared skeptical and expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless at the first staff development meeting. What seems to have led to the differences in the teachers' attitudes and behaviors noted at the end of the practicum, was the personal attention that was given to them by the coordinator. Without exception, teachers' statements during the follow-up interview reveal that they felt the staff meetings and the coordinator's individual meetings with them provided the support they needed to step up their efforts to communicate with the home. Teachers commented that they appreciated that they were "not alone" in the effort to involve families and that they felt supported knowing there was a back-up if they could not reach the home. It was this attention and support given to the teachers that created a momentum for action. Despite their reports that they did not use different strategies to involve families, it is clear that the teachers did change their behavior. Teachers took on more of a leadership role with families. They called home more often, sent personal notes home more often, and redesigned activities in order to

increase the chance of successful family participation. The reading teacher initiated an additional home-school literacy project with excellent participation. The PARP committee set a participation goal of 100% sending a clear message that they expected that all families could and would help their children. The leadership and attention teachers received moved them to act and give attention to families.

This momentum generated at school was spread to the home through the actions of the school staff as they increased personal contact with families. It is felt that this increase in personal contact explains much of the increase in parent participation in homework and PARP participation. Few parents took advantage of workshops and conferences but the experience of being invited (often through personal telephone conversations) increased the amount of positive attention they received from the school and seems to have given them an incentive to complete home-school projects. With both the coordinator and the classroom teacher calling home and providing information about school activities, families knew what they needed to do and were motivated to do it.

Results suggest that the activities that included personal attention to families (phone calls, individual conferences) were responded to in a positive fashion, whereas activities that followed a more traditional and impersonal model (sending home notices, school-based parent workshops) were not. It appears that families responded to individual attention in much the same way that children do, and just as some children need more attention than others, some families need more attention than others. Many of the barriers to parent involvement were broken down by paying attention to families, either through extending personal invitations to meetings or through personal notes and phone calls. As teachers increased the frequency of personal communication

with the home, the families increased their involvement in home-school activities.

As the momentum for involvement grew, the climate of the school began to change. Lack of parent participation in basic academic tasks was no longer permitted to be "business as usual." Encouraged by the coordinator, teachers took a more active role in involving families which resulted in families taking a more active role in reading and doing homework with their children. This became a positive reinforcer to teachers and they intensified their efforts. In the words of one teacher, "I saw that parents were responding to my efforts and that made me try harder." The momentum generated by the initial leadership and attention given to teachers and families is evidenced by the increased participation in activities going on both in classrooms and in homes. The combination of leadership and attention created a momentum for change and action on the part of both the school staff and the families.

These findings are consistent with the literature. Epstein (1987) speaks of teachers needing to be leaders in the effort to involve families. Lueder (1988) found that personal involvement and genuine interest is necessary for family involvement. Christenson (1992) rightly states that home-school collaboration is an "attitude, not an activity." However, This statement may not go far enough. An attitude (or vision) is necessary, but more important is the communication of that attitude through dynamic interactions between school and home.

Remaining Barriers

Both family and school barriers remain. Families with low literacy skills and families from different cultural backgrounds continue to have poor participation rates. Teachers are limited in the amount of time and access to telephones they need to make the calls necessary to sustain family

participation. The PTA has been unable to involve non-neighborhood families in their activities. Non-neighborhood and minority families continue to feel uncomfortable in the school building as evidence by their failure to attend school-based functions.

A possible reason that families participated more in academic-type activities (homework) than in other types of activities (workshops and fundraising) may be found in Speigel, et al.'s (1993) results suggesting that low-literacy parents tend to define their role differently than high-literacy parents. Specifically, low-literacy families see their role as that of supporting their children through activities such as providing materials and making sure homework is done. Participating in specific academic activities (e.g., PARP and homework completion) is consistent with this perception of their role whereas participating in other types of activities (e.g., fundraising, workshops) would require them to reframe their role. Such reframing probably requires more intensive and longer-term efforts than one school year. In fact, Becher (1982) reports that successful parent involvement programs often require a minimum of 18 to 24 months of intensive efforts. In the short-term however, the results of this practicum suggest that family participation can be successfully increased in those academic-type activities which are consistent with their perception of parent-roles.

Cultural background also effects how a family views its role in school activities. In the course of this practicum the writer had the opportunity to speak to many people in the community about parent involvement in the schools. Leaders in the Hispanic community strongly maintained that the cultural differences between the United States and Latin or South American countries are factors in poor participation. Sending information home in Spanish is not enough to draw these parents to school because they come

from countries where parents were not encouraged to play a role in their children's education. To many of them, it is a strange idea that they should come to school and participate in school activities. In dictatorial countries, an open dialogue with school leaders is not only discouraged, it may be dangerous. One Hispanic immigrant observed that asking a parent to help teach a child to read may be interpreted as incompetence on the school's part. The school is expected to take care of academics. The first few workshops held in the Hispanic communities should probably focus on introducing American school practices before leaping into "how to help your child become a better reader."

Comments from other community members were somewhat more troubling and suggest that an additional barrier to home-school cooperation may be the lack of confidence the community has in its own members. There seems to be a belief among some that not all parents want to be involved in their child's education. Families who have been on public assistance and lived in public housing projects for generations are described by people in their own community as not believing in the value of education as a means of "getting out" of the welfare trap. While discussions with only a few individuals should not form policy or theory, such discussions cannot be ignored for they suggest that leadership and attention must be directed to the community in an effort to provide the momentum and action necessary to convince people that family participation is important and can be achieved.

If leadership and personal attention to teachers and families is what generates the momentum and action necessary to increase family involvement in home-school literacy activities, it may be necessary to restructure the way schools operate. Time for sharing information must be built into the school routine so that teachers and support personnel can

develop additional strategies to reach all families. The Goals 2000 legislation passed by Congress in 1994 includes the goal of increased family involvement. The results of this practicum suggest that family involvement is attainable when school personnel are given opportunities to lead and support efforts and when resources (time and technology) are available to extent to families the attention they require.

Recommendations

Several implications for future programs can be gleaned from the implementation and results of this practicum. The most important recommendation is that this effort must be considered only the beginning of a long process to involve parents in school activities. It must not be considered a program which has ended. As Becher (1982) notes, long-term consultation is required to make permanent changes in parent involvement. In the short term, efforts to involve families must continue into the next school year. Efforts should continue to assist families in feeling more comfortable with coming to the school and getting involved in different kinds of activities. Parent visits should be encouraged rather than discouraged. Despite the low turnout at workshops, they should continue to be offered. Opening them up to more families of other than first and second graders and/or to families from more than one school building might increase attendance.

Staff development should also continue. Now that teachers are feeling somewhat more positive towards parent involvement efforts, perhaps they will be more willing to participate in staff development workshops to develop different strategies. Several formats are available to administrators. Round-table discussions to share home-involvement strategies could be made part of regularly scheduled faculty meetings or separate staff development workshops could be part of a Superintendent's Conference Day.

Additionally, efforts to involve families should not be limited to the school year. While teachers and school psychologists have taken an active role in making summer camp and scholarship information available to families and in helping camps provide tutoring or reading enrichment, much more needs to be done. Perhaps the school district could investigate writing a grant to maintain family involvement over the summer. A coordinator for family involvement could work to maintain contact with families of "at-risk" students and assist them in getting to the library, lend out books, or lead "family storytimes" in the community. A mini-book-mobile (a district van loaded with books for lending) could visit specific neighborhoods on a regular basis.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum will be shared with the Superintendent of Schools, the building principal and the school faculty. It is hoped that the analysis of the results will be further examined as efforts continue to involve more parents in home-school literacy activities. The writer has already informally shared the information regarding the importance of personal communication with teachers and parent leaders in the PTA.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW TO EVALUATE PROGRAM

TEACHER INTERVIEW TO EVALUATE PROGRAM

(Administered verbally to individual teachers)

To help evaluate our efforts to involve more families in school-based activities, I'm going to ask you a few questions about the parent involvement efforts that we made this year. The results will be reported anonymously. I would like you to be as honest as you can so that we can improve our efforts next year.

1. Do you feel that families, particularly the families of the students that are bussed to this school, were more involved this year than you've found in past years? If so, what were the differences you noted?

2. Do you feel that you made any changes this year in the way you reached out to parents? What kind of changes?

3. Did you use any new strategies this year to communicate with the home?

4. Think back to the staff meetings we had, were they helpful? If so, in what way? If not, what would you have preferred?

5. Did you attend any parent workshops? If so, how did you find them?

6. What feedback did you receive from parents about the workshops?

7. Do you feel that communication is now adequate between the school and the parents of the children bussed to this school?

8. What ideas do you have for next year?

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL FAMILY PLAN FOR LITERACY FORM

INDIVIDUAL FAMILY PLAN FOR LITERACY

Family:

Children in home and their ages:

Literacy Goals:

Current skills and activities:

Family needs (e.g., ESL, GED, child care, library card, afterschool care):

Plan of Action:

The school will:

The family will:

APPENDIX C

NOTICES OF PARENT WORKSHOPS

Parents, Families, and Friends

You Can Make the Difference!

Learn How You Can Make Your Child A Better Reader with Books, Food, and Fun

Tuesday, October 25 at 2:00
King Street School Library

Thursday, October 27, at 11:00
Weber Drive Activity Room

Friday, October 28 at 12:00
YMCA, Port Chester
English and Spanish

THERE WILL BE CHILDREN'S BOOKS, SNACKS, AND FUN. **Please Come!**

Making the Holidays Fun

MAKE IT AND BAKE IT!

(And help your child learn)

Come join in the fun and learn how YOU can use the Holidays to improve your child's reading!

Tuesday, December 6, 1994
11:00 AM
Weber Drive Activity Room

Thursday, December 8, 1994
11:15 AM
King Street School

Call Natalie Fulwider for information and RSVP (934-7998)

Para Hacer Los Dias Libres Divertidos

Hacerlo y Cocinarlo

(Ayuda a su hijo aprender)

Reuna con nosotros para aprender como Ud. puede usar los dias libres para desorrolar mejor las habilidades de su hijo.

El Martes, 6 de Diciembre
11:00 de la manana
Weber Drive Activity Room

El Jueves, 8 de Diciembre
11:15 de la manana
King Street School

An invitation to all Kindergarten and First Grade parents:
All Aboard....

Hop aboard the train to ReadingLand...

Topics:

- how easy it is to make "ReadingLand" games
- community and school summer reading programs

Refreshments, fun, and learning! Plus a ***raffle*** to win a book for your child.

Meet at the "station"--the King Street School Library on

Tuesday, May 2, 1995

at 2 pm. **Don't let the train pull out without You.**

Call Natalie Fulwider (934 7998) for more information

64

APPENDIX D

OUTLINES AND OBJECTIVES OF PARENT WORKSHOPS

OBJECTIVES AND OUTLINES OF PARENT WORKSHOPS

Parent Workshop 1

Family Storytelling: Reading together, Sharing Stories, Choosing Books...

Objective: Participants will be learn how to select appropriate books, how to read aloud to their child while fostering comprehension skills, and how to help their child read aloud while having fun.

1. Participants are welcomed and refreshments are served. Participants are encouraged to introduce themselves to each other and to talk about their children.

2. Participants are thanked for coming and told that it is true that children whose families are involved in school activities seem to learn more and do better in school.

3. The leader brings out a crate of children's books and each participant selects a few to look at. The leader discusses why these books are appropriate and what to look for in a children's book (text size, controlled vocabulary, repeated words and phrases, good illustrations). All information is presented in language that the participants can understand with a limited amount of jargon.

4. The leader demonstrates techniques for reading aloud to a child. Appropriate comprehension questions are demonstrated and the participants

are given a chance to respond and to give examples of other kinds of questions.

5. The leader demonstrates techniques for helping a child read aloud. New strategies that are being used in the classroom to teach reading are given to the participants. For example, teachers allow children to look at the picture and then back to the word to try to think of a word that would fit, or they suggest that the child go ahead and finish the sentence and then come back and try to figure out what would make sense. Cautions about letting a child struggle too long over a particular word are included as well as reassurance that it is OK for a child to "memorize" a book and want to read it over and over.

6. Participants are encouraged to do other activities besides reading aloud with their children. The importance of storytelling activities is stressed. Parents and grandparents who tell stories about their childhood enhance the experiential background of the children and build both listening skills and self esteem as the child learns about his or her heritage. As children get older they can be encouraged to write some of these stories down, further practicing writing skills.

7. The prepared booklet is handed to parents and it is looked through together.

8. The remainder of the meeting is devoted to specific questions and issues that the participants bring up. If possible, participants are allowed to borrow certain books to take home and practice with their child.

Parent Workshop 2

Making the Holidays Fun: Make It and Bake It (And Help Your Child Learn)

Objective: Participants will create a holiday decoration and learn how to make creating holiday crafts and foods a literacy building experience.

1. Participants are welcomed and refreshments are served. Participants introduce themselves and begin to talk about their children.

2. Materials necessary for the task are distributed out and the written directions are provided to each participant. It is explained that following directions is an excellent way of fostering organization and sequencing skills in children and how such skills influence reading.

3. Participants begin to follow the directions while the coordinator moves about the room and demonstrates appropriate kinds of questions and discussion. For example, if the activity is making a bell, parents can ask the child about times that bells are heard or about different kinds of bells. They can also ask the child to think of words that rhyme with bell. Participants are reminded that these are the kinds of discussions that keep children thinking and engage them in learning while they think they are just having fun!

4. Participants are allowed to take extra materials home and the prepared booklet with other holiday activities is distributed.

Parent Workshop 3

PARP: What is it? How to Make it Successful

Objective: Participants will become familiar with the PARP expectations and procedures as well as learn where to obtain books for free.

1. Participants are welcomed and refreshments are served. Participants introduce themselves and begin to talk about their children.

2. The procedures of PARP are explained in a cheerful and upbeat manner. It is explained that despite the title Parents as Reading Partners, we do not require the parent to be the only reading partner. For example, the partner could be a grandparent, and aunt or uncle, or an older sibling. Spanish speaking families are reminded that reading books in Spanish is

perfectly acceptable, that the goal of the program is to generate interest in reading activities within the home.

3. Participants are given suggestions of where to find reading material. Several teachers have brought in personal books which they will lend to families if necessary. Other opportunities to get books exist within the school and the community (for example, the public library and one of the community centers are sources for borrowing books).

4. Participants are given an opportunity to discuss the program and to ask questions. Any potential problems with participating in the program are addressed.

Parent Workshop 4

Hop Aboard the Train to ReadingLand...

Objective: Participants will be learn how to make games with their children out of inexpensive materials that will reinforce reading skills.

1. Participants are welcomed and refreshments are served. Participants introduce themselves and begin to talk about their children.

2. Materials are distributed and participants begin to make a game board following the coordinator's instructions. While they are making the game, the coordinator discusses ways of playing the game and how to adjust the game to the level of a particular child. It is stressed that these games are to be used to reinforce skills, not to teach new skills, and that the level should be easy enough for the student to be successful and have a chance to "win".

3. Other types of games that can be made are demonstrated with the participants "playing" some of the games.

4. A prepared booklet of ideas is distributed.

APPENDIX E

MAKING YOUR CHILD A READER!

MAKING

YOUR CHILD

A READER!

TIPS FOR PARENTS WHO WANT TO HELP THEIR CHILD BECOME A READER

Compiled by Leslie Salvatore & Natalie Fulwider

DISTRIBUTED BY KING STREET SCHOOL

Setting up Good Reading Practices

Help your child find a quiet, comfortable place to read. Some parents put a special pillow in a corner and call it the reading corner.

Have your child see you as a reading model. The more you read, the more the child will see reading as a valuable activity.

Visit the library together. Help choose books that are appropriate and interesting.

Read aloud to your child. Reread favorite stories.

Read with your child.

Discuss the stories you read together. Ask questions. Have your child ask questions for you to answer.

Recognize the value of silent reading.

Keep reading time enjoyable and relaxed. Try to make it a "special time" for just the two of you.

Parent helper tips

Before you say "sound it out". . .

Wait 5 - 10 seconds -- see what the child does

Try these:

"What would make sense here?"

"What do you think that word could be?"

"Use the picture to help you figure out what it could be."

"Go back to the beginning and try that again."

"Skip that word, and read to the end of the sentence. . . Now what do you think that word could be?"

"Put in a word that would make sense there."

"You read that word before on another page. See if you can find it."

"Look at how that word begins. Start it out and keep reading."

Tell the child the word.

Encouraging Comments

"Good for you. I like the way you tried to work that out."

"That was a good try. Yes, that word would make sense there."

"I like the way you went back to the beginning of the sentence and tried that again. That's what good readers do."

"You are becoming a good reader. I'm proud of you."

ADD YOUR OWN "Encouraging Comments"

IDEAS THAT WORK!

1. Storytime -- Tell stories with your child. Make up stories with him or her or tell stories about ancestors. Children love to hear stories about their aunts, uncles, and grandparents when they were young.

2. Have child look through a page in a book finding words he knows how to read. Write these down in a notebook organized like a dictionary ("A" page, "B" page, etc.). Make a goal to add one new word a day.

3. When your child is reading and comes to a word he is struggling with, wait 2-3 seconds then tell him the word.

4. Read the same books over and over.

5. Tape record your child's favorite stories so he or she can listen to them whenever he or she wants.

6. Read cereal boxes, soup cans, cake mix boxes, etc. outloud, pointing to words.

7. Go ahead and point to each word as you read it. Encourage your child to do the same thing and see if it helps.

8. Refrigerator letters: buy inexpensive plastic letters that have magnets on the back. You and your child can make words and sentences on the refrigerator while supper's cooking.

9. Sign Making: Have your child make signs, "Donna's room," "Billy's books," "Please knock."

10. Post Office: Cut paper to size of postcards and have child color a picture on one side. These are your postcards. Write each other notes and "deliver" them to the correct "mailbox" (decorated shoe boxes).

11. Weekend wrap-up: On Sunday night, take time to write a short story about what happened during the weekend.

12. Read recipes: recipes contain words, fractions, measurements, and following directions. If you cook without recipes, write some down for your child to read.